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TRADE AS A PROFESSION

The majority of professional traders in Nupe are Bida men and women. For these professional traders the restriction to the small areas which are characteristic of inter-village trade does not apply. The whole country, and indeed the whole of Nigeria, is their field of activity. Trade, business, is independent of the boundaries of a community, a tribe, or language. Inside Nupe one of the results of this extensive trade is the regularization of hospitality towards traders in all larger villages of the country. Only a few traders may be able to find relations in the distant places to which their business takes them. The others are free to stop in every house. The rules with regard to the compensation for this form of hospitality which does not fall in the category of kinship duties vary locally. In Mokwa the guest maintains himself and is expected to give his host a parting gift of 10–15 kola-nuts (representing about 1*s.* 6*d.* in money). In Kacha, a much larger business centre, the population of which consists to a very large extent of traders, a stranger who has no relatives in the place may go to the chief, who will allot quarters to him. The guest receives lodging as well as food, but is not expected to make any gifts in return; he is expected only to return the hospitality in his own village should his host be taken there on his business trips.

Outside Nupe the Nupe traders are frequently more than merely birds of passage. They stay at a place for several months or even years at a time, and may possibly settle there permanently. We find such colonies of Nupe traders in every larger town of Nigeria, in the northern Emirates as well as in the Europeanized centres of trade in the south. In the north they speak Hausa; in the south they can mostly get on with Nupe (only a few Nupe men and women have learned Yoruba). Not the least convincing evidence of the century-old route of Nupe trade to the south, down the river Niger, is that Nupe language is understood all along this route. In places on the lower Niger where the lingua franca of the north, Hausa, is no longer understood I found that the people would speak and understand Nupe. Although in the life of the traders tribal and cultural affinities are subordinated to business interests, these links re-emerge in a new form. In these foreign parts where the Nupe live as aliens, they are drawn together by the link of their common language and common origin. They form small cultural enclaves, Nupe colonies, and tend to live together in the same part of the town. These colonies do not form social units or communities in the narrow sense of the word; rather, they are fluid, semi-temporary, groups brought together by the chance of common enterprise. They can hardly be homogeneous; they contain men and women from different sub-tribes and parts of Nupe country. Moreover, they spring up suddenly, and may disappear again as suddenly, owing to changes in the economic conditions. But while they exist they show a strong tendency to develop something like an organized community life. They all feel themselves as Nupe; they recognize the ranks and forms of status valid at home and elect a head or chief in Nupe fashion. Many men and women in these colonies are joined in the course

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a person of consequence, but did not find it at all out of place that he should have built himself such a pretentious house. We shall also hear later that in the Bida age-grade associations young men of low birth can even taste the thrill of having special drum-signals and songs composed for them like the members of the nobility.

Polygamy is another characteristic instance. The large-scale polygamy of the Nupe aristocracy remains beyond the reach of all other classes. Polygamy as it exists in the houses of the Nupe kings must even be regarded as a royal prerogative and thus as a fixed symbol of status. Yet polygamy on a more modest scale represents another universal want, the effectiveness of which can be studied in every stratum of society, and when peasants tell you of the 'good old times' when their chiefs and elders were able to marry large numbers of wives, they express the effectiveness of this incentive.[1]

We may also mention the demands of hospitality, which are recognized among the poor as well as the rich. Inability to fulfil these demands is regarded as a definite deprivation. Even in small peasant households will you find 'permanent' guests—persons who have been adopted into the household and may even be supported by their hosts when they are too old, or too ill, to gain their own living. Significantly, they were described to me as *ke bara na*, 'a kind of *bara*'.

One of the common ideals of the people of Nupe demands closer investigation. The reliance on employed labour by the privileged sections of the society establishes a separate leisured class, which lives by the labours of others and gains its livelihood to a large extent from the 'interest' borne by their human capital. Evidently, 'leisure' is a relative concept. In a society where the large majority works (say) ten hours a day, a group which can gain its livelihood by working only half the time represents already, comparatively speaking, a 'leisured class'. Thus for Nupe, as for every society, the definition of the leisured class must remain fluid. The well-to-do traders, the 'intelligentsia' of the Mallams, the rich landowners, and the well-paid N.A. officials, all are, in different measure, members of the leisured class compared with the hard-working farmers, craftsmen, or manual labourers. Let us understand the full import of this fact. Many forms of enjoyment depend upon leisure: recreation and aesthetic pleasures; among women, the possibility of keeping young and attractive. They all form part of the standard of living which is typical of the highest social stratum of Nupe. Again, they become, as such, also incentives for Nupe society at large, and affect the evaluation of specific occupations. We have studied their effectiveness in such reactions as the break-up of the family labour-unit under the influence of what we have called the 'new values and temptations' spreading from the town; we shall discover an even more conspicuous instance in the spreading of the Mallam profession.

[1] It is impossible to test the correctness of their sometimes rather extravagant claims. Yet the psychological reality of the incentive is unaffected by such questions of historical truth.

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The integrative tendencies in the *ena* are expressed in every one of the typical age-grade activities. In the village they revolve round the three centres of social life: work, recreation, religion. In the Bida *ena* the first is reduced to insignificant dimensions; the second is raised to almost paramount importance; the third remains on the whole unchanged, being only transferred to a different plane—Mohammedan religion.

I have already spoken of the role which the *ena* plays in organizing collective farm-work in the village. We need only add that these activities concern the higher age-grades more than the junior groups, the members of which are not yet skilled farmers. It is commonly agreed that every young man who has gone through the three grades leaves the *ena* a fully trained farmer. Not everyone can become a *Sode*; but the success of the team counts for much. Here the *Ndakotsu* will prove his capability as organizer. He will put his pride into making his team the most efficient—all means being counted as fair. An old man, still known as *Ndakotsu*, told me how he used to help his group of workers to defeat all the other teams by means of a charm which 'made their hoes go twice as fast'.

Under recreational aims we must understand both recreation in the narrow sense—age-grade feasts and 'parties'—and the conventional festivities with which the Nupe celebrate kinship events: naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. The recreational activities in the narrow sense concern the individual association; in the celebration of kinship events to which all young men who are related to the family are invited, members of different grades frequently join. The *Ndakotsu*, *Etsu*, and also the members of higher rank are expected to entertain the group in their houses at fairly regular intervals. There will be food, drinks, kola-nuts, and often drummers and dancers. In Bida the members of the *ena* meet at least once a month at such parties. Smaller festivities are attended only by the *ena* members themselves; to the larger meetings, especially those which mark the beginning and end of the *ena* term, friends and relations of both sexes are also invited. At one of the festivities with which the inauguration of the new age-grade term was celebrated in Kutigi I counted well over a hundred guests.

Let me take you to such an age-grade feast in Bida. It is held in the courtyard of the house. It starts in the afternoon or evening and lasts far into the night. The guests sit and squat in a closely packed circle, leaving a small space in the centre for drummers and dancers. On one side the host is sitting together with *Etsu* and *Ndakotsu*; as a rule they only sit and watch the performance; but the guests are ready at every moment to exchange the role of spectators for that of performers. There exist special *ena gbarifuzi* dances, performed at these occasions: they consist of a slow, graceful forward-and-backward movement of a row of dancers, five or six young men, who dance side by side, the arms stretched out and the body bent slightly forward, setting their feet in small, measured, steps. Group follows group in the dancing arena. Individual dancers leap into the 'arena', and perform a short solo or

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pas de deux of leaps and cart-wheels which, when executed skilfully, will be greeted with applause or, when less successful, with good-natured laughter and banter. There are special drum-signals for every higher *ena* rank which are sounded when the young men take the scene and join in the dance. Rich age-grade associations, or certain high rank-holders in the association, even have special dances and songs composed for them, which are played, not only at these meetings of the *ena*, but also whenever the *ena* members appear elsewhere at a public gathering. Drummers and woman dancer would walk up to the young man, and the dancer would recite the song which she composed in his honour.

> Moonlight makes all things good to look at.
> The *maba* bids the townsfolk farewell for the night.
> Give us of thy knowledge,
> Ibrahim Ganleyi,
> Thou grandson of wealth.[1]

Drum-signals and songs are not the only symbols of age-grade status. At every such festivity one of the drummers or some self-appointed 'master of ceremonies' will assume the role of an announcer. He is called *maba*; announcer and jester in one, he must be witty and have the gift of the gab. He collects the small gifts of money which guests make to drummers and dancers; he announces the name and rank of the donor and recites the virtues of his ancestors and famous relations (impressiveness counting more than truthfulness), adding such praises or witticisms as seem appropriate to the rank of the donor and the amount of the gift. We see again how closely Bida age-grade etiquette follows its model—the Nupe nobility; it copies every detail of its symbols of status and wealth, even such features as the specific interpretation of dignity forbidding persons of high rank to join in the common dance.

It is easily understood that in the village, along with the model, the copy must be absent also. At the gatherings of the village *ena* professional dancers and musicians are rarely summoned. There is no *maba* and no extolling the feats and virtues of celebrated ancestors. Age-grades and age-grade ranks 'own' their special drum-signals and dances; but they are associated with the group, and not with certain individuals who can afford to pay for the distinction.

The religious events in which age-grade associations participate concern all grades. In the pagan ceremony especially the different grades are allotted different tasks, which imply in varying measure admission to the esoteric ritual activities. The main religious ceremony of pagan Nupe, the *gunnu*, makes the *ena* members the protagonists of its ritual drama and dances. Another ceremony, which occurs only in the Benu

[1] This song, which was composed by the *zuworo* group of dancers (see p. 302), in the honour of the young man called Ibrahim Ganleyi, was recorded at an age-grade feast in the house of a well-known Bida Mallam. It begins in the fashion of all Nupe songs with the quotation of a well-known proverb. The term *maba* which occurs in the second line is explained in the description that follows.

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limited to acts of violence committed unwittingly, in the course of the torch throwing and playful fighting. The torch processions invariably led to serious organized fights between the three *ena* groups from the three divisions of the town. On their way back from the river one *ena* would ambush another, and try to invade its 'territory'. A fierce fight would ensue, lasting the whole night, fought with torches, sticks, stones, and even formerly (as my older informants maintained) with swords and guns. Serious wounds and loss of eyesight were a common feature of these 'battles of youth', which were fought with all the violence of heated party feuds. For party feuds they were—inspired by the political rivalry that is embodied in the threefold dynastic division of the kingdom. Let us reflect that the *navū* provides the only occasion at which all the scattered age-grade groups of Bida are united in common action. The unity which they achieve is typical of Bida society—a unity based on partisanship and political factions. The acts of violence committed in the *navū* fights led the Administration to intervene, and the fights were forbidden under *Etsu* Bello. Yet the memory is still vividly alive. Younger and older men who have once participated in a fight still proudly recount their feats which helped their side to win. But even young boys, novices at the *navū*, are aware of the traditional significance of the ceremony. At the *navū* of 1936 schoolboys from the Middle School had been encouraged by their teachers to send, for the first time, an official contingent to the *navū* procession and to take their place among the age-grade groups. The boys did not anticipate a 'proper' *navū*; for, as they explained to the director of the school, if they were to behave according to traditional standards, 'the *yan doka* (police) would get nasty'.

Certain important activities and obligations embodied in the age-grade association outlive the lifetime of the *ena* and accompany the individual through his whole adult life. The celebration of kinship events with the co-operation of age-grade associations is a first instance. All members of an *ena* are required to appear at the kinship feasts celebrated in the house of one of the *ena* members, and this duty applies both to comrades and ex-comrades. When a man celebrates the naming ceremony of a new-born child, or the wedding of himself or a close relative, or when he buries his father or elder brother, he will expect all his old comrades to come, to bring their congratulations or condolences, and to join the family guests. The Nupe greatly appreciate kinship festivities on an imposing scale, with a large—and generous—attendance. Age-grade loyalty is thus enlisted to make the festivities a success and to add to the prestige of the host. The readiness of the ex-members of an *ena* to fulfil these social obligations towards an old comrade depends, however, on the rank which he had held in the *ena*, and on the popularity which he enjoyed among his fellow members. If the age-grade association is thus designed to contribute to the social prestige of its ex-members in adult life, this dependence on the goodwill of one's comrades must, in anticipation, act as an important controlling influence upon behaviour in the age-grade association itself.

There exists also a certain clearly formulated code of conduct which

4: Temple G-4 (no date) 1922
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The men eat together in a similar way, but apart from the women, and tiny boys may feed with either. Any snacks such as honey-cakes, or fruit, are eaten at odd times in the day, and water is always drunk after meals, not at them. Eggs were never eaten, but the practice of doing so is gradually creeping in.

In the ordinary routine of life people get up at 4 or 5 a.m., observe salla, and go about their respective avocations which, with a two hours' interval at mid-day, they pursue until 6 p.m. when they again make salla and have their evening meal. This ended, the children, boys and girls alike, go and dance in the market, from which they are retrieved by their elders, with some difficulty, about 9 p.m. and sent to bed. The men pay each other visits, and sit talking in groups of three or four till about 11 p.m., or on bright nights as long as the moon is up. Women do the same, but in their own compounds. They do not pay many visits, but go to see their mothers once every month and their sisters more rarely. Their husbands encourage friendship between their wives and the wives of their friends. If a man is at home when his wife receives a visitor he salutes her and goes out, and when he goes to visit his friend he goes in to salute the women of the house, and then either sits outside with his friend or goes to his hut. A man is expected to call on his parents-in-law every Friday, the Muhammadan holiday, but is never accompanied by his wife, unless it is to accuse her of some ill deed.

The incoming of the Muhammadan New Year is a time for great rejoicing. On New Year's Eve everyone eats as much as he or she can hold, and the poor can ask for a meal from anyone. Next day they make prayer, and everyone contributes in alms according to his means, with a minimum of a hundred cowries, which the Mallams distribute amongst the needy. A Mallam then foretells events of general interest for the coming year, when the rains will come, and whether they will be heavy or light, the success of the crops, whether there will be much sickness and in what months, whether there will be fertility amongst the stock, and amongst the people, and the best month for the purposes, etc. It is a day for visiting amongst the grown-ups, and calls are made on all persons of importance. On their return from prayer the children play a game. They may raid the houses of any uncle or aunt, grandparent, or one following the same trade as their father, and take anything they can lay hands on, unless and up to the time the person raided gives each child twenty cowries. The elders may not defend their own property, but the children of the household do, and battles are waged between the young people. This custom is dying out where there are white men.

Other games played by the children are hide-and-seek and king-of-the-castle, but they rarely have toys, and never balls.